



## ***National Middle School Association Conference***

Follow-up to Action Lab: The Parthenon

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*Time Travel: Myths & Legends*

**Website:**

[www.parthenon.org](http://www.parthenon.org)

Students and teachers are fortunate to have the world's only full-scale replica of the ancient Parthenon in Nashville, Tennessee. The museum offers unparalleled opportunities for teachers to combine field trips with national curriculum standards for a variety of subjects including Social Studies, Language Arts, Visual Arts, Math & Science. The basic tour (adjusted to grade level) consists of visits to the Naos (to view the 42' gilded statue of Athena), the Treasury, and the art galleries. All K-12 groups must be guided, and with advance notice the museum can tailor the tour to fit specific curriculum needs such as mythology, the mathematical aspects of the Parthenon, leadership and the foundations of Democracy, or specific exhibits and artists in our galleries.

The education department provides a number of special programs and services including language brochures (ten languages plus Braille), special tours for the blind and visually-impaired; traveling trunks, teacher workshops, teacher *packets* and lesson plans (available on the education page of our web site); performance art, including plays and mythology storytelling; and summer programs and workshops for inner-city youth. This year the department is creating family gallery activities. In addition our "Teen Symbouli" (council) is creating special programming for teens that will include performance presentations, workshops, *Poetry Slam*, activities for Latin clubs and other special groups, and a symposia series for teens.

### **Curriculum Connections:**

The Parthenon offers excellent opportunities for students to make visual connections in a variety of subject areas. In addition, it enables teachers to show how history, language arts, visual arts, music and math/science from any period of history work *together* to reflect cultural values and intellectual progress and to lay the foundations for later generations. Following are suggestions for connecting the Parthenon and mythology to various subjects and curriculum standards.

### ***Whole School/Whole Person:***

Just as America's founding fathers and mothers looked to the Classical world for examples in government, the arts, education, the logical formulation of arguments and positions, and the development of a whole and balanced individual, schools can take up a similar challenge, establishing for students the historical foundations of modern life, an environment that encourages intellectual growth, and the development of the individual potential.

### **What is Myth?**

More than a misconception or some delightful "invented tale," a *myth* is defined by Richard Buxton (pg. 18, *The Complete World of Greek Mythology*) as "a socially powerful traditional story." Throughout history the myth filled a universal need for answers. "How did we get here?" "Why are there floods?" "Why do people fall in love?" The narrative must have passed through the generations, embody the values of the people, and generally comes to us in a number of versions. And whether the mythological being is a god or goddess, a monster, dragon, or animal, they universally tend to be *anthropomorphic* – endowed with human traits.

Our sources of evidence, especially for Greek mythology, include text (such as plays or heroic tales including Homer's *The Iliad* or *The Odyssey*), wall and vase paintings, sculpture, and coins. Place names throughout the ancient Greek world find connections to specific mythological characters or events. The impact of these myths remains powerful even in the twenty-first century through word meaning ("Herculean"), corporate identity (*Nike*™), literature (*Ulysses* by James Joyce), event (*The Olympics* ©), or motion picture (*Oh, Brother! Where Art Thou?* ©). Let's explore the connections between Greek mythology and various areas of study. In so doing, we discover the relevancy of the ancient world to our 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

## **The Greek Myths and Literature**

**I. The following activities are part of the Language Arts Lesson Plans on the Parthenon Web Site.** Through these activities the learner will understand

- The meaning of the word, myth.
- The role of mythology in the ancient, preliterate world and throughout history.
- The elements of myth.
- How myth relates to our modern world.
- How to write a myth.

### **Activities:**

1. *What is a myth?* Allow students time to give their definitions of the word, myth; then using several dictionaries, look up the definition. Do dictionaries agree on the definition or are there slight variations? Look again at the definition of myth by Robert Buxton in the introduction to this section. How

does his definition agree or diverge from those that the students discovered?  
Ask the class to agree on one definition.

2. *What was the role of mythology in the ancient, preliterate world?* **This is a great exercise for classes with diverse student populations. It often allows immigrant children an outlet for sharing their heritage and national pride while informing all students of the rich cultures around us.** Divide students into teams for a visit to the library. Ask each team to look at the mythology from a specific area (African, Greek, Irish, Roman, Native American, etc.) and select a favorite myth. In a report to the class, each team should explain the importance of this myth, focusing on the following questions: a) Does it focus on human nature or natural phenomenon? b) Does it focus on the nation's religious heritage or history or a combination? c) Does it focus on humans, monsters or deities? d) If human, is the central figure heroic? e) What is the quest or goal of the hero? f) What do monsters represent in the myth? g) What does the myth tell us about the values and beliefs of the people? h) Why would there be several versions of the same myth? **After the team presentations, discuss similarities between the myths of the different countries or regions. Are there stories, characters or situations that are similar regardless of the distance between these countries?**
3. *What are the elements of myth?* Look again at the stories and team reports. On the board start a list of the elements that appear similarly in the stories. (Examples may be a creation story, the presence of half-animal/half-human creatures, the similarity of duties for the gods and goddesses, the sorts of duties assigned to each deity, the heroic quest, the challenges heroes face, etc.). What are the similarities and differences in myths from various parts of the world? What could account for similarities in the isolated worlds in which so many of these ancient people lived?
4. *How does mythology relate to our modern world?* We are all familiar with what happened in "a galaxy far, far away." Many popular movies ("Star Wars," "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy, "Oh, Brother, Where Art Thou?" and the Indiana Jones trilogy) are based on mythical tales or follow mythological structures (quest, challenge, good versus evil, a specified series of steps to reach a goal, etc.). Pick your favorite from these or other films and answer the following: 1) Who is the hero of the tale? 2) What is his/her quest? 3) What are the challenges the hero must overcome? 4) Are there a specific series of steps to be followed? 5) Who assists the hero on his/her journey? 6) Is this a fight between good and evil? 7) Does the hero fail at any time during the quest and how does the hero recover? 8) Does the hero triumph in the end? (This exercise can also be applied to many video games).
5. *Write a myth.* Now that students have explored a variety of myths and many of the elements of myth, ask them to create a myth. Students may work in teams or individually. They may use existing mythological characters, deities and monsters or create their own. They may focus on how natural phenomenon – rainbows, stars, thunder, etc. - were created, on the heroic quest, on the struggle of good versus evil, etc. They may set their story in

ancient times or in the future. Particularly artistic students may create a storyboard for their myth while other students may wish to simply write the story. Students may wish to review elements of good storytelling – plot, character, setting, etc. – and submit an outline before writing the myth.

**II The following exercise assists students in understanding “why these old stories are important to us today.”** Through these activities, the student will gain an understanding about

- How ancient mythologies formed a literary framework for later works.
- How mythological names permeate modern society and the subliminal meanings they have for users and listeners.
- How literature throughout history has tapped into the mythology and made it current to the times.

Activities:

1. Ask students to look at and dissect an epic poem and a myth using the questions listed in #4 of the exercise above. Create a formula for the story or poem. Then using a modern poem or book (for example, one of the Harry Potter books), use your formula to show how the ancient writers created a literary framework that continues to be used.
2. Have students brainstorm to create a list of products, company names, science or NASA programs, sports teams, commercials, etc., that rely on mythological names or words to convey the meaning that companies, owners, sponsors, or advertisers wish to convey to consumers.
3. Throughout history intellectually charged eras such as the Renaissance, the Elizabethan era, or 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment were spurred, in part, by a rediscovery of classical literature, art, science, math, and political thinking. The teacher should make a selection of authors/works listed below (or their own list) that illustrates to students the impact of mythology to the history of great literature.
  - Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queen*
  - John Milton, *Paradise Lost*
  - William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer’s Night Dream*
  - William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*
  - Works by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Eugene O’Neill, James Joyce, Lord Byron, John Keats, Percy Shelley, Rudyard Kipling, J.K Rowling, Anne Ursu (*The Shadow Thieves*), or Rick Riordan (*The Lightning Thief*, *Sea of Monsters*).

### **Greek Myths and Vocabulary:**

A basic knowledge of Greek as well as Latin language elements will assist students in the development of vocabulary, spelling and language skills. Ask students to look over the list below (including the definition of each element) and write a word using that element.

Greek Element	Definition	word
* aero	(air, wind)	
* aesth	(feeling, sensation)	
* amphi	(around, both sides)	
* anti	(against, opposed)	
* astro	(star, pertaining to outer space)	
* auto	(directed from within)	
* biblio	(book)	
* bio	(life)	
*cardio	(pertaining to the heart)	
*chromo	(color)	
*chrono	(time)	
*cine	(movement)	
*crat	(suffix: rule, govern)	
*demo	(people)	
*derm	(skin)	
*dys	(prefix: bad, wrong)	
*endo	(within)	
*eu	(prefix: happy)	
*ex	(prefix: former, out of)	
*geo	(earth)	
*graph, graphy	(write, describe, draw)	
*helio	(sun)	
*hemi	(half)	
*hydro	(water)	
*icon	(sacred or holy image)	
*olatry	(suffix: worship excessively)	
*logo	(talk, speak, word)	
*logy	(study of)	
*macro	(large, great)	
*mania	(mental disorder)	
*mega	(huge)	
*meter	(measure)	
*micro	(small, tiny)	
*mono	(one, single)	
*morph	(shape, form)	
*nau	(ship, sailor)	
*neo	(new)	
*ortho	(straight, correct)	
*pan	(all, every)	
*philo	(love)	
*phobia	(fear)	
*phono	(hear, sound)	
*photo	(light)	
*poly	(many)	

<b>*pseudo</b>	<b>(false)</b>
<b>*pyro</b>	<b>(fire)</b>
<b>*seismo</b>	<b>(shake)</b>
<b>*techno</b>	<b>(skill, craft)</b>
<b>*tele</b>	<b>(far away, distant)</b>
<b>*theo</b>	<b>(god, deity, divine)</b>
<b>*thermo</b>	<b>(heat)</b>
<b>*tox</b>	<b>(poison)</b>
<b>*xeno</b>	<b>(foreign)</b>
<b>*zoo</b>	<b>(animal)</b>

**Students may also combine many of these elements to create words such as “biology” (life-study); or democrat (people-rule).**

### **Greek Mythology and Geography**

Historian Simon Shamus’ book, *Landscape of Memory*, builds upon the strong connections between a nation’s mythology and the landscape as he demonstrates how both are imbedded in the memory and collective souls of the people. The historian sees “wilderness as a part of who we are at the deepest level.” For example: deeply imbedded in the independent, “can-do” American identity are narratives of long-hunters, pioneers, cowboys, explorers, Native Americans, and immigrants searching for better lives. The magnetic pull of “Manifest Destiny” drew settlers eager for western migration over and through a succession of natural barriers – the Appalachian Chain, the Mississippi River, the Rocky Mountains, and the unforgiving deserts of the west – to fulfill a dream of an America spreading from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Each of these landscapes forms a part of the national identity and include narratives of heroes and villains, truths and legends.

**Particularly with regard to Greek mythology, the landscape (both natural and man-built) plays a major role in shaping the narratives, as pointed out by Richard Buxton in *The Complete World of Greek Mythology*. Modern archaeology explores and brings to light the significance of man-made structures and often long-lost locations in regard to myths—for example, the actual location of Troy (still debated) or details of places such as Olympia (lost to the world until it was rediscovered in 1766 by English antiquarian Richard Chandler).**

**However, it is the natural landscape that plays such a prominent role in these beautiful narratives. Today’s students, especially those living in urban areas, pay little attention to topography – the physical features of a place or region. Let’s look first at the role of landscape in Greek mythology.**

Elements of the landscape, throughout Greek mythology, could range from idyllic, protective, inspirational, or sacred to primitive, savage, terrifying. The changes may take place within the span of moments. The same morphing of a site often appears in modern tales/mediums as well as everyday existence. For example, idyllic forests in movies, *The*

*Wizard of Oz* or *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* can suddenly morph into dark and terrifying places where the limbs of trees become bare, reaching arms that attempt to attack or capture innocent visitors. The ambiguous, changing nature of the streams, rivers, and seas from inspirational and playful sources of life to swollen, violent purveyors of destruction and death are especially familiar to students.

Four natural elements prevalent in Greek mythology are mountains, caves, rivers/streams, and the sea. Each was the residence of a deity and each played a crucial role in story development of various myths and heroic epics.

**Mountains:** As prominent in mythology as on the physical landscape, mountains served a variety of purposes - as home to the gods (Mount Olympus); as learning center for heroes such as Jason and Achilles (Mount Pelion); as birthplace of Hermes (Mount Kyllene) or hunting grounds for Artemis (Mount Taygetos); or as a launch to another level (Bellerophon's attempt to rise above his station to the level of the gods, or Herakles' rise from mortality following his death on Mount Oita to his new home on Mount Olympus).

**Caves:** Mortals see caves from a variety of viewpoints. To some caves conjure claustrophobic feelings; to some a cave is a source of adventure; to some a space for protection from the weather; and to some a cave is a source of inspiration and solitude. For example, Native Americans often utilized caves for vision quest ceremonies involving cleansing and prayer rituals. In Greek mythology, entrance into the recesses of earth literally placed one inside the goddess, Gaia (earth goddess). Caves were the preferred sites for Nymphs to worship and as a result Pan, always in search of nymphs, was associated with caves. Caves, like mountains, could appear idyllic and be sites for accessing the sacred or providing protection, but caves could turn suddenly into places of savagery.

**Rivers and Springs:** Access to rivers and streams has always been a life-line to mankind, serving as a source of fresh water for every day survival, for crops, and religious ceremonies as well as serving as major trade and transportation routes. Throughout the ancient world rivers themselves were deities. The Greeks saw the deep, powerful rivers as male and the nurturing springs as female. River gods tended to be local deities associated with a particular river.

**The Sea:** More powerful than rivers was the sea. Although the Greeks had a number of lesser sea deities, the sea was clearly the domain of Poseidon, brother of Zeus and wielder of great power over the vast, changeable ocean. Poseidon is depicted as fierce, reflecting the unforgiving power of the waves, but he was sometimes depicted as a benevolent father-figure to the multitude of sea creatures and to mankind.

**Mythology offers students an opportunity to rediscover and reconsider the role of geography and of the landscape in a variety of ways.**

**\*Ask students to look at a map that includes Europe, the Mediterranean Sea, North Africa and Asia. Then list the ways in which geography impacted Greece in areas such as trade, culture, education, mythology, politics, etc. Does the location of Greece on the map offer particular benefits over its neighbors? Does the location of Greece provide specific dangers over its neighbors?**

**\*Ask students to consider how the landscape affected the history of their town or city. (For example, in Nashville, Tennessee, students might consider the historical impact of Cumberland River, the Timothy Demonbreun cave, Capital Hill, the Natchez Trace, the “gulch,” the hilltop fortress site of Fort Negley, or the geographic importance of Nashville in relation to the eastern and southeastern United States). Can the students tell any stories or myths associated with any of these places?**

### **Greek Mythology and Science:**

Mankind has always probed the questions “how?” and “why?” and “what?” Such inquiries press against the outer reaches of faith and reason, creating theologians and artists, philosophers and scientists. The ancient Greeks, like people from other civilizations, explained the hows (how did mankind appear on earth?), whys (why do people fall in love?) and whats (what causes seasons to change?) through narratives filled with the deeds of gods and goddesses, mortals, and monsters, and heroic voyages and battles. Myth and science combine to provide answers about natural phenomena for the ancient Greeks.

**Assign students to one of six teams. For each of the following forms of energy ask students in the team to tell the myth about its origin, including the associated mythological character. After sharing the mythological narrative, each group should (with teacher supervision) consult their science books or the Internet and perform a simple scientific experiment (some sources listed below) to demonstrate the energy form.**

<b><u>ENERGY FORM</u></b>	<b><u>MYTHICAL CHARACTER</u></b>	<b><u>EXPERIMENT</u></b>
<b>Light/Reflection</b>	<b>Narcissus</b>	
<b>Sound/Acoustics</b>	<b>Echo</b>	
<b>Fire/Heat</b>	<b>Prometheus</b>	
<b>Lightning/Electricity</b>	<b>Zeus</b>	
<b>Motion</b>	<b>Hermes</b>	
<b>Seasons/Growth</b>	<b>Demeter and Persephone</b>	



**Some Experiment Sources:**

**Reeko's Mad Science Lab:**

**<http://www.spartechsoftware.com/reeko/Experiments>**

**Energy Quest:**

**<http://www.energyquest.ca.gov/projects>**

**“Greek Mythology and the Forms of Energy” developed by Donna Quillen, Prospect Elementary School, Monroe, NC. See the following web site:**

**<http://www.greekgods.info/mythology-curriculum.html>**

***The Complete World of Greek Mythology*, Richard Bunton (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004).**

***Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1995).**

